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Thriving in turbulent times = Perpetuating the status quo?

Summary

One of the ways in which elite world makers are enabled and empowered to create partnerships, alliances and consensus-driven activity for greater sustainability and equality is through the existence of global meetings and forums that contribute to forms of transnational governance. Responsibilities for issues of sustainability and inequality are debated and problematised across boundaries of geography and power through global forums representing parts of a global social field. On the one hand, these forums allow for a multiplicity of positions to be heard and explored but, on the other hand, may be dominated by presumptions of what can and cannot happen in the world depending on what the world makers consider to be 'thriving'. In this paper I argue that different strategies are enacted and this has an impact on the extent to which the socio-economic status quo is challenged or perpetuated.

Keywords: Bourdieu, sustainability, inequality, elite, global forums

Thriving in turbulent times = Perpetuating the status quo?

Introduction

Representatives of trade, politics and civil society who are positioned to act and influence across societies have been theorised as collectively symbolising a “field of transnational relations” (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2007), or a “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair, 2012). These are mirrored by “transnational civil society” (Burawoy, 2010, p. 64), or “transnational movements” (de Bakker et al., 2013, p. 577). All of these global social actors believe in better worlds and are in positions to be ‘world makers’. As part of their broader portfolio of individual and organisational action, they interact across organisational and geographic boundaries in ways of world making, that is, executing the power to define meaning towards particular material effects (Bourdieu, 1989). They participate in a global field (Bourdieu, 1983), the context of which is addressing issues of sustainability and inequality in our world.

The dominance of neoliberal capitalism as the taken for granted ‘how things are’ in global socio-economics has been continually questioned and undermined since the turn of the century. Yet despite global ‘crises’ that could provoke the emergence of a more sustainable and equitable system, the status quo prevails. This suggests that: 1) the ‘crisis’ is not perceived by elites as something requiring response (‘crisis’ is ‘normal’); and/or 2) that the responses to the ‘crisis’ are such that the status quo is perpetuated. In this paper, I explore a set of dynamics that enable global social actors to challenge or perpetuate the status quo according to their interests. All global social actors are able to pursue responses to global inequalities, but the strategies pursued are varied and characterise the struggle to make the world in a particular way (for example, preserving, adapting, or creating new worlds). ‘Thriving’ is therefore conceptualised differently depending on the position of the actor and the end-game played – for example, challenge or perpetuation.

The research on which this paper is based includes interviews with global social actors (world makers) who participate in “world-straddling organisations” (Burawoy, 2010, p. 64) as manifestations of this global field; specifically the World Social Forum (WSF), which is purposely noted in Banerjee’s (2008) work as a mechanism through which normative practices are challenged and resisted, and the World Economic Forum (WEF), “an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas” (World Economic Forum, 2012). These forums can be conceptualised as representing different positions in the field, within which global social actors will conceive of the crisis of inequality and sustainability in different ways and requiring different responses in order to thrive. Bourdieu’s three types of strategy are described as follows: 1) conservation strategies, which potentially conserve the field as opposed to challenging the status quo; 2) succession strategies, involving direct interaction and struggle between different global social actors to try to ‘succeed’ one another’s beliefs and so make new worlds; and 3) subversion strategies, which seek to radically transform the field to make new worlds.

This paper is structured as follows. Firstly, I consider crisis and response through the lens of Bourdieusian social theory. Secondly, I offer details of the methodology and research context on which this paper is based. Thirdly, I offer an analysis of the types of strategies within the field and, finally, discuss the implications of this for our understanding of how more equal and sustainable worlds may emerge.

Crisis and response

The last decade has been characterized by threats to/collapse of organisations, against a backdrop of differing perceptions of economic, natural and social resource constraints (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). There have been a number of incidents including riots in England¹, the birth of the Occupy movement², and the Arab spring³, reacting to the unsustainable economic and environmental practices and social inequalities in the world. These threats and collapse are both constructed by, and symptomatic of, an era of crisis that offers the possibility of change to the status quo because of changed and/or changing distributions of economic, political, social and cultural power that seem to open up the opportunity for other, more sustainable and equal worlds to emerge (Held *et al.*, 2010). Given that these disruptions happened in different geographic locations, it is of interest to consider global-level interactions of social actors that make the worlds of themselves and others (Held *et al.*, 2010). I argue that these global-level interactions can be observed through Bourdieu's notion of field.

In Bourdieu's conceptualisation, fields are social (not physical) spaces in and through which social actors act and behave. Fields are configurations of social relations that are not clearly demarcated, but the boundaries do exclude some to include others. New entrants to the field and/or those less dominant within the field by nature of the volume, combination and type of capital they have accumulated may have the means to undermine, subvert and resist those who are in dominant positions. Through fields, analysis can be made of the positions and interactions of social actors (Postone *et al.*, 1993). People take positions in the field between dominant and dominated poles, internalise the field and understand the 'game' of the field to shift positions. Fields have specific logics relating to who fits therein, what it is to be successful in these contexts, and rules of the game represented by the field. In Bourdieu's (1990, p. 66) words there are those who have "native membership" in a field, perhaps through longevity of position or chance of birth, for whom "everything that takes place in it seems sensible". These social actors can be perceived as being dominant in the field, with great resources and great control of the nature of the field. There is stratification in fields, but social actors are not blindly subject to this (Thomson, 2008) and because fields are nested, they touch and spark one another with potentially minor but not necessarily insignificant differences as social actors actively participate in different ways. Novelty of points of view (Bourdieu, 1985) may create ambiguity that can open a crack for change to emerge. Social actors are able to "change the principles that structure a field" (Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007, p. 24), that is, change can be enacted from within because field positions are not static.

¹ Riots in England during the summer of 2011 initially began in London, emerging from a peaceful protest in response to the police shooting of Mark Duggan. Unrest broke out in other cities including Nottingham, Birmingham and Manchester in the following days.

² The first occupation took place in Liberty Square, Manhattan, in September 2011. The movement began as Occupy Wall Street but quickly spread to other cities around the world to become the Occupy Movement. Occupy Wall Street (2011) *About Occupy Wall Street*. Available at: <http://occupywallst.org/about/> (Accessed: 24/09/15)..

³ The first incident recognised as being part of the timeline of protest known as the Arab spring was in December 2010, when a Tunisian trader, Mohamed Bouazizi, immolated himself following an exchange with police. This was followed by acts of protest in multiple countries including Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Libya. Blight, G., Pulham, S. and Torpey, P. (2012) *The Path of Protest*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline> (Accessed: 24/09/15)..

Researchers are able to explore what is at stake in particular fields, understand who, how and why social actors participate and accept the field for what it is. Fields highlight the fluid and dynamic characteristics of struggle and conflict in social interactions, rather than privileging consensus or harmony in a fixed position (Swartz, 1997). In this respect, “the generative, unifying principle of this ‘system’ is the struggle, with all the contradictions it engenders” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 316). The strategies within the field emerge as global social actors interact to make the world in a sustainable and equal way according to ‘their’ definition of the global agenda; they will act in such a way to try and achieve this in the most effective way possible. These strategies comprise: 1) conservation, where those who are dominant may act to stay dominant (conserve their dominance to define meanings and the value of capital); 2) succession, where those who are submissive in the field seek to become dominant (succeeding existing dominant social actors within present rules); and 3) subversion, where those who are submissive undertake direct challenge of those who are dominant by changing the definition of the rules of the game (overthrowing and replacing dominant social actors with new rules and values) (Swartz, 1997).

Bourdieu sees strategy as more intuitive, responsive and interactional; “strategies are the product...of a feel for the game which leads people to ‘choose’ the best match possible given the game they have at their disposal...and the skill with which they are capable of playing” (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 64). Bourdieu talks of the “space of possibles” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 344) as a way of allowing for different boundaries and configurations to emerge. Like any typology, these are simplistic categories for what can be revealed in the field, but useful for understanding how shifts might happen through ripples and perturbations in the field as a contested social space. The typology may appear fixed; however, these strategies are neither mutually exclusive nor static. Global social actors act in response to the social context in which they are present (Bourdieu, 1994), which may involve multiple strategies and/or different strategies according to different times/positions.

Methodology

Across two sets of contacts, one for WSF and one for WEF, I spoke with a range of individual and organisational representatives from the private sector, public sector and civil society organisations to gather a range of perspectives (Rapley, 2007). Where known, I also prioritised contacting those with job titles or organisational responsibility related to ‘sustainability’, ‘environment’ or ‘social’ issues⁴. I undertook 38 interviews, 28 were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim (1,806 minutes of material), and 10 were not because of participant preference and/or available technology for recording. These interviewees were not recorded and transcribed verbatim, but points were noted contemporaneously by me during the interview. The notes and transcripts were shared with and agreed by the interviewees and permission was given by the interviewees to use them in the research. This paper draws on material from 16 interviewees as described in Table 1.

Table 1: Interviewees as quoted in this paper

Pseudonym	Role
Jacob	Senior academic
Paul	Senior academic

⁴ Many global social actors (and social actors in general) interact across multiple fields. I had to make a choice about categorising them according to their ‘main’ or ‘primary’ field for the purposes of organising my material.

Mason	Union Representative
Matthew	International Coordinator
Olivia	Grassroots activist
Nathan	Executive Director
Phillip	Director
Katherine	Associate vice president
Joshua	Executive Director
Dexter	Secretary General/CEO
Helen	Academic
Vincent	Grassroots activist
Jason	Senior Advisor
Theo	Senior academic
Riley	Director
Tristan	Religious leader

I was concerned with understanding what my research participants do in these forums and their other social contexts, and why (in their terms) they do it. I cannot claim that the interactions with my research participants offer anything other than a snapshot insight into the areas discussed. The commonality of the research participants has been their participation in one or both of the forums but this by no means offers a cohesive ‘data set’. The numbers are tiny in relation to the overall volume of participation in the forums and the research participants are from a range of different backgrounds and perspectives. This follows Alvesson (2011, p. 5), who wrote that “we should avoid giving interview material an a priori status (as indicative of reality or meanings) and instead think through a set of interpretive possibilities for assessing what the material is about and for what purposes it can be used”.

Here, I describe a set of actions undertaken with the empirical material. These were not necessarily undertaken in a linear manner, often they were happening concurrently and/or iteratively. I can identify the first step in my interpretive process, which was the reading of my journals, from which I created a set of posters that outlined key points emerging therefrom. Following the initial production of the posters, I read and re-read the transcript material with my research questions in mind. I highlighted parts of the texts in different colours according to the research question. I also created an Nvivo project as a material management tool. Interviews and email correspondence were stored here and this enabled me to identify examples from the material using queries and reports. In terms of interpretive activity, following Eschle and Maiguascha (2005) the empirical material co-constructed with research participants through this research is not considered an external object for study; rather my interactions with the material (interview transcripts, documents, my own notes) and the research participants (email, telephone, Skype, face to face exchanges) serve to produce knowledge about their experiences and the relationships with these forums. Because of the nature of my research context, the notion of struggle (Bourdieu, 1983) and the often conflicting opinions and ideologies revealed both between and within each, I have spent time considering the contradictions, conflicts, complexity and paradoxes within the empirical material, and tried to include and account for them in my interpretation, through notes and as presented in this paper. The notion of possibilities is important here, recognising that there are multiple ways to view the material, resulting in a range of potentially complimentary and conflicting interpretations (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson, 2011; Hibbert *et al.*, 2014). A singular story is provided here, but with many others to be told beyond the scope of this artefact.

Thriving (1): Strategies of conservation and the status quo

Swartz (1997) interprets Bourdieu's notion of conservation as relating to the maintenance, preservation and/or extension of the field in the interests of the dominant. I argue that this is one form of conservation strategy that may be evident, but not the only one. It is insufficient to claim that only the dominant will pursue conservation strategies and two versions of conservation are explored here. There are, firstly, particular global social actors who would seek to define and respond in ways that either further drive economic growth or certainly do not suggest any fundamental shift of existing global economic patterns of behaviour (neoliberal capitalism). In doing so, this conserves the status quo and its associated privilege. It is likely that these global social actors are the most dominant dominants, that is, 'hardcore' neoliberals who privilege the economic over and above other forms of capital. Secondly, I argue that there is a form of conservation strategy that is evident through those global social actors who are the most dominated dominants, that is, 'hardcore' challengers who privilege the social/environmental above other forms of capital. They are conserving their position as having a moral high ground. In this respect, the oppositional positions of these global social actors at such extreme poles of the field may actually conserve the status quo as they need one another to challenge and maintain their positions. There is a question as to whether these global social actors truly seek new worlds and improvement in the state of the world, or if they do it is within certain parameters. These two positions exist in relation to one another to simultaneously conserve the field.

Illustrating the first type of conservation strategy, interviewees described lively discussions in WEF activities as being with nuances of opinion towards the same end rather than sharp differences between views. Jacob emphasises the limited extent of challenge evident and that those who are within the debate are considered moderate, perhaps even 'safe', in their differences of position. He suggests: *"for the most part, most [WEF] meetings consist of the chorus singing to the chorus and the choir singing to the choir, with some dissonant voices, there are debates, there are disagreements, but they are within parameters, it's not an anything goes kind of situation"*. These global social actors, therefore, are conserving the status quo towards the privilege of neoliberal economics as the status quo. There is actually insufficient turbulence and challenge to enable the status quo to be problematised. Paul offers a specific example of the relationship between health-related industries and responses to the causes of ill-health:

"Certainly what I picked up in the health field is that there's a lot of pressure from the industries to influence what [WEF] does and says in the health field, recently all the alcohol industries have joined and you can quite pick up just from corridor conversations is that you know they're really trying to influence the debate. I mean on one hand what they want is sort of honest answers from the forum, but they want to use the forum to their own benefit, so they see the forum as being you know maybe a way of getting a better relationship between the alcohol industry and the World Health Organisation, which the industry desperately wants, that's where you start seeing the influence."

He describes a situation where global social actors who represent economic interests (the 'industries') are trying to influence the global agenda in their favour by engaging with the World Health Organisation through WEF activities. There is, therefore, an extent to which

improvement in the state of the world is only sought within existing, conserved ways of being.

The second type of conservation strategy is evident through those global social actors who participate to seek to conserve their position as a static, superior antithesis to that represented by WEF. Mason comments: *“one represents the ruling class, the other represents the oppressed layers of society. They are diametrically opposed”* and this oppositional strategy actually prevents the emergence of new worlds as it holds the other in infinite relation. Within the field, there are dominated dominant positions that take a counter to the status quo of neoliberal capitalism and examples of absolute critique of global social actors who seek to conserve economic dominance are evident (largely within the example activities of WSF). I argue that these global social actors aim to conserve their absolute critique as being righteous. This can be seen, for example, as Matthew describes: *“[WEF] for me is totally embedded in the system, so it’s the leaders of global corporations with some global politicians, they’re all fundamentally constrained by the need for economic growth, the need for profits and most of the sustainability agenda is the window dressing”*. Olivia also comments: *“WEF is taking forward an agenda of capitalist[s]. That’s a capitalist structure and I don’t trust it”*, and Susanna comments that WEF is: *“a space for centralising and furthering privilege and inequality”*. In this respect, it could be argued that these global social actors conserve their dominance in terms of being ‘right’, knowing that there are alternative, better, more equal and more sustainable ways of being in the world and so they completely disregard those who believe otherwise as erroneous and insignificant. Their dominance is claimed because they consider economically-dominated global social actors “so illegitimate that they are not even worth talking to, and should rather be abolished than recognized as legitimate partners of dialogue” (Ylä-Anttila, 2005, p. 437). Matthew describes his position as follows:

“It all depends on the agenda you have and on the vision you have, my vision is that the current economic system with the current type of global corporations is just totally unsustainable and needs to completely transform. So I would question the need for global corporations, the current power of corporations but also especially driven by global investors and global financial markets.”

The result is potentially the conservation of the status quo, with each position struggling to conserve their perceived dominance. This is indicative of the interconnected nature of the strategic positions, that they are not mutually exclusive but there is a reliance on one another that maintains the social order. The field, like any social order, has evident rules, experiences and structures that are unquestioned by social actors therein and strategies of conservation seek to maintain these. Despite different positions, these example global social actors see their way as being ‘right’ and ‘dominant’ and therefore as they struggle to protect them through the field, nothing (or very little) changes – the chance of new worlds emerging is slight.

Thriving (2): Strategies of succession and challenging the status quo

Succession strategies may challenge the status quo and create new worlds by global social actors playing the same game as those representing perceived dominance in the field. This may be in two ways: 1) by taking over the positions of the most dominant dominant actors; and/or 2) by changing the values and beliefs of the most dominant dominants to become driven by the social and environmental over and above the economic (again shifting the status

quo). Therefore, the main aim of strategies of succession is to work from within existing rules of the field to shift positions and redefine the rules. Nathan introduces examples of this in practice as follows:

“...a few of the NGOs that participate in the [WSF] process might also be part of the NGOs forum, or the NGO whatever space that is in Davos and in the [WEF] setting. Sometimes I think there is an overlap between those NGOs in terms of other spaces, so for example, in the World Trade Organisation, or ... the Conference of Parties, the UNF triple C conferences, there’s ministerials that they have, there is often what is called the inside strategy and the outside strategy and there are social movements who are largely in the outside strategy space in terms of mobilisations, in terms of protests, in terms of alternatives that are often preferred and projected but not within the inside, that is the where the negotiations are taking place at the ministerial level and then there are NGOs that are very much in the inside strategy that work with governments often...And then there are some that sort of do both, that have an interaction with the outside as well as the inside.”

Nathan describes strategies of participation in different global forums, including WSF and WEF. He characterises them as ‘inside’ (interpreted as Bourdieu’s ‘succession’) and ‘outside’. The ‘outside’, subversive strategies will be discussed in the next section. I have interpreted ‘inside’ as ‘succession’ because it can be interpreted as involving collaboration, negotiation and/or alliance with dominant dominants. As notes from the conversation with Phillip show:

With something like WEF – there are certain immovable things which seem to be capitalism, oil and growth, these things are unacceptable to change. Do you get inside and try to make more change, but small change? Or do you shout from the outside? This provides agitation and has a role but it is not where the decisions are made.

Phillip’s point identifies the inside/outside approaches but, in his view, the outside approach offers mere ‘agitation’, where as he favours the inside, successive approach albeit that he recognises the ‘small’ nature of change that may be achieved. Because succession strategies require an element of cooperation, collaboration and/or alliance, global social actors holding different positions have to mutually engage. It may be that each has a different strategy behind their engagement, for example, succession to achieve greater dominance or succession to change the dominance. In my research, examples of succession strategies are mostly demonstrated by those global social actors who do seek to challenge the dominant through negotiation and engagement; however, this does not preclude the possibility of dominant dominants pursuing succession to subsume any challenge, that is, to increase their domination (which could be interpreted as a form of succession). As Katherine describes: *“power is really leveraging the people in industry...to do things, to move things, and if they feel like they’re being beaten up on, it’s going to make it worse”*. These points demonstrate the balance of the struggle of the field; that too much opposition (being ‘beaten up on’) may ‘make it worse’ and that the field actually offers the opportunity to ‘make common cause’ instead.

Unlike conservation strategies, I argue that succession strategies offer some potential for new worlds to emerge, but they are problematic. Bourdieu himself, for example, was critical about field position alliances, that they are:

“always based on a more or less conscious misunderstanding...in which the...dominated agents among the dominant, divert their accumulated cultural capital so as to offer to the dominated the means of objectively constituting their view of the world and the representation of their interest in an explicit theory and in institutionalized instruments of representation – trade union organizations, parties, social technologies for mobilization and demonstration, etc.” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 737)

In Bourdieu’s view, there is more scope for the dominant to benefit than other social actors, echoing theories of co-optation (Burchell and Cook, 2013a). Joshua follows Bourdieu’s critique regarding those global social actors who practice succession strategies. He explains:

“The idea of collaboration by the NGOs in [WEF] is politically extremely tense as an issue and is why we as an organisation identify absolutely with the [WSF] and would never go near the WEF (unless we’re going to throw things at it or have big demos outside), participation with it is absolutely out of the question, whereas for the bigger NGOs, for them, the idea of being within the tent trying to influence these things is very important for them. And particularly for us, this is very, very problematic... I use it in the same sense as it is used in France in the Nazi era, when I say collaboration I mean as in ‘collaboration’, I don’t mean it in a nice way⁵.”

In Joshua’s view, such a strategy perpetuates and justifies the behaviours and beliefs of dominant dominants, rather than changing anything. He believes that this strategy has the effect of maintaining the status quo at best, increasing inequality at worst, rather than promoting a transformational goal. Despite this view, Dexter comments as follows:

“Davos...is the sort of epitome of the elitist way of doing things and you’re there and I can see that if you run, if you’re the head of [high profile INGO] and you’re invited to Davos but some of your colleagues aren’t, it sort of legitimises your own role in the world, that [high profile INGO] is therefore a bit more important than, or if you’re one of the 40 NGO leaders there then you’re one of the top 40 NGO leaders perhaps, it’s very convenient especially if you’re not a sort of radical space to then be able to go back and meet your funders or your board or whatever and say, ‘it’s a way that we can influence the agenda because we were invited to this or that’.”

Dexter’s point is that global social actors gain different, significant capital from being able to participate in particular areas of the field, because of the opportunity to interact with others who have economic and political dominance. WEF, representing the most dominant area of the field, has the capital of organisation, order, longevity and great renown, and engaging in a strategy of succession may enable certain global social actors to create greater influence and therefore provoke change more quickly and/or more effectively. Actors evaluate the

⁵ ‘Collaboration’, in the sense that Joshua means, relates to World War Two in which Jewish people were identified to the Nazis by a number of European governments. His meaning, therefore, is that collaboration in WEF is becoming like them.

beneficial effects to them and their agendas of participating in these forums and the exchanges therein against the problems and drawbacks. This is not always satisfactory and it is certainly not static; forum participants are constantly reviewing and considering their position.

Thriving (3): Strategies of subversion and overturning the status quo

Subversion is about fundamentally creating “another world” (World Social Forum, 2002) through alternative ways of being by actors against and separate from the perceived causes of global issues, and by a focus on the worlds of those most affected by global issues of inequality and unsustainable practice. This is the ‘outside’ strategy that Nathan introduced above and these global social actors are committed to achieving shifts in a very different way to those currently perceived to be perpetuating the current world order (e.g. Courpasson *et al.*, 2012). Subversive strategies are about ‘acting’ for change rather than ‘reacting’, as just ‘reacting’ may conserve the status quo, as Olivia describes: *“opinions all the time are attacking global capitalist regime rather offering something new. I believe we need to stop reacting, and start acting.”*

In most instances, strategies of subversion are enacted by global social actors who seek a transformation towards social, environmental and economic balance and the offer alternative action. Joshua describes an example of shifts in the dominance of capital from the economic to the social as a result of subversive participation in the field:

“[Our organisation] lobbied for the introduction of supermarket ombudsmans, groceries code adjudicator which has now come in, again, even under a Tory⁶ government we managed to get that, and you could say, again, this isn’t the life changing thing whereby the whole of the world is going to start spinning in a different way, but for the first time you have an external, independent adjudicator with the power to fine these companies... So things like that which I suppose we would see as our victories, because they are on the way to rebalancing power relations between [economic] capital and society.”

These global social actors, as illustrated by Joshua’s example, are acting differently, generating transformation by playing a different game to that played by politicians and corporations perceived to perpetuate the dominant discursive regime in their own interests (e.g. Haunss and Leach, 2007). They are engaging in debate and developing new ways of being and doing that challenge existing and dominant global practices (e.g. Dick, 2008). Subversion may be achieved by broadening the agenda, encouraging greater privileging of social/cultural capitals within global capital. Helen describes one example of this:

“What [WSF has] at least started to do is to give some sort of platform to movements of people who have in some way been marginalised by Western modernity and globalisation, people of the global south...for example, in the 2004 Forum in Mumbai... I think the thing about that was that the Dalits, the untouchables, came in huge numbers, forest people came in huge numbers.”

⁶ ‘Tory’ is a colloquial term for the UK-based political party, the Conservative Party, linked to its historical foundations. Its policies are characterised by traditional family values, cautious spending and the responsibilities of the individual to work for their own advancement.

Helen describes that strategies of subversion have enable voices to be heard who do not usually have a platform to express their experiences, yet are affected by the world making of global social actors. Vincent describes his experience of subversion through WSF:

“During [WSF] we had many different initiatives, alternatives, new ideas to look globally and think locally, it was a two ways movement because the people from around the world come together they share their experiences and they went back to their places and there they make the changes...the [WSF] was doing something like from the micro to the macro and back again, it was like a feeding the ideas and spreading is more like capillary structures into the society.”

Vincent reveals his approach to voice and enact alternatives, which slowly change how the world is through a steady permeation. Subversion is achieved through ‘feeding the ideas’ and ‘capillary’ action spreading them. The global social actors who pursue these subversive strategies are those who consider the pursuit of new worlds to be best achieved by actively challenging activities represented by dominant actors. Mason’s point of view illustrates this: *“the future of humanity will not be found in a market, but precisely by overthrowing such chaos and developing a democratically planned economy.”* They aim to subvert the existing dominant (and inadequate) responses to global inequalities by offering complete alternatives.

Discussion: Thriving in turbulent times = Perpetuating/challenging/overturning the status quo?

There are evident factors maintaining the status quo, ‘the way the world is’ (conservation strategies), as well as factors that may enable new worlds to emerge (succession and subversion). These strategies represent ways in which global social actors act with one another in their responses to issues of sustainability and inequality at a global level. However, these strategies are not planned or designed in any particularly instrumental way, rather they are revealed according to the interrelationship between the embodiment of the global social actor, their experiences/dispositions, and the social contexts in which they are positioned. These global social actors are trying to make better, more sustainable worlds emerge as a result of their engagement within the field. None of these strategies are static or mutually exclusive, different global social actors will be enacting the field in different ways at different times according to the social contexts they are in. What is of particular interest is the ways in which these strategies may perpetuate or challenge the status quo and this is discussed as follows.

Firstly, conservation strategies may result from global social actors who believe they are right, that ‘this is how things are, should be, and always have been’, they are comfortable and the field reflects this. Their positions and the field rules are conserved through their past loyalties plus ‘status quo’ field pressures to prevent any change. By perceiving positions as purely oppositional, this perhaps drives global social actors to the defence of their respective corners, creating a stalemate and no adequate response to issues of global inequality and sustainability. This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Conservation strategies and field/world making effect

Strategy	Examples	Field/world making effect
Conservation strategy 1: (dominant dominants, economically-driven responses to sustainability)	Jason: <i>"we have utilised this for discussing and learning about issues that are particularly related to, from our perspective, related to sustainability issues. So we have participated in specific sessions on Africa and we have participated in specific sessions on mitigating CO2 from road transport and electromobility, we have participated in issues related to traffic safety and the fact that you have a fair amount of people being killed on the roads and we have of course listened to and learned from the more political discussions on what is happening in the world."</i>	Limited, because these global social actors are conserving their positions and in doing so aiming to protect the rules of the field (world status quo). These global social actors are continuing 'business as usual'.
Conservation strategy 2: (dominated dominants, socially/environmentally-driven responses to sustainability)	Olivia: <i>"In the current setting of global capitalist world, countries are [bound] to global capitalist standards and they are not looking for alternative that can offer equality and social justice. Equality and Social justice should ideally destroy capitalism."</i>	

Secondly, succession strategies may transpire from global social actors who believe that there needs to be change (challenging the status quo), but that: 1) they are considered 'wrong' by other global social actors (perhaps those who seek conservation/subversion); 2) they are considered 'right' but in an uneasy manner; and 3) they are 'right' and there is no problem with them. Their positions and the field rules are potentially succeeded in different ways, depending on their past loyalties plus pressures from the field towards the 'right' way to make change. This is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Succession strategies and field/world making effect

Strategy	Examples	Field/world making effect
Succession strategies exist but they are 'wrong' (dominated dominant, socially/environmentally-driven responses to sustainability)	Theo: <i>"the economic, political and cultural assumptions of the WEF and the WSF are for the most part completely opposed. There may be a few overlaps but it is very clear that the emphasis of the former is on economic productivity and trade that will never go against the interests of the global top economic 1%. To substantially help them one would need, at the very least, to redistribute some of the wealth of the rich to the rest of the world population. The WSF wants to reduce or end inequality while the policies of the WEF do not have this aim in mind."</i>	Theo expresses an irreconcilable division between opposing ways of achieving greater equality and sustainability. The concern relates to the potential maintenance of something that he perceives as unacceptable through participation. He considers WEF and what it represents to be perpetuating global inequalities, therefore those who engage (even if they intend to challenge) serve to support it by their presence. Rather than subverting, they help to reproduce an unequal and unsustainable way of being in the world.
Succession strategies are 'right' (dominated dominant/consecrated heretic, socially/environmentally-driven responses to sustainability)	Riley: <i>"[WEF's] a vehicle by which we are able to take a topic on sustainability that we believe will be incredibly important and get it to a broad group of people at the highest level and get them to begin to engage in it and understand it. And it doesn't solve the problem, the problem is solved or the issues are addressed after that either collectively or independently...it just starts moving the thinking on in organisations."</i>	For some, like Riley, change in the field can and should (also) be enacted in and through the engagement opportunities offered by global forums such as WEF with those global social actors who are perceived to generate, perpetuate and protect the current order, because by influencing them, there will be a shift in the 'rules'.
Succession strategies are 'right' but uneasy (dominated dominant/consecrated heretic, socially/environmentally-driven responses to sustainability)	Tristan: <i>"I understand going may legitimise, but if we don't go and speak this language that critiques neoliberal approaches, a language that critiques the less caring attitude towards the majority by the minority, challenge them and change their heart."</i>	Tristan participates in WEF for his ideas to become embedded in solutions to global sustainability issues, to realise his interest over others by 'speaking this language that critiques neoliberal approaches'. Tristan makes uncomfortable compromises (Burchell and Cook, 2013b) in his engagement.

Finally, subversion strategies may result from global social actors who believe they are right, that there needs to be change in the world, they are comfortable and complete transformation of the field is necessary. Their positions and the field rules are potentially completely subverted through their commitment to transformation. This is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Subversion strategies and field/world making effect

Strategy	Examples	Field/world making effect
Subversion strategies (dominated dominant, socially/environmentally-driven responses to sustainability)	Matthew: <i>“so the relationships I see that wherever there are opportunities to work with social entrepreneurs, with businesses that try to work outside of this system, so for example more cooperative based organisations, so there are even very big ones in the UK, there are a few in other countries, there are a few employee-owned, so all these that are not necessarily so constrained by global financial markets, there is a more transformative agenda possible if the typical way of campaigning against corporates doesn’t drive fundamental change it might be, it might have some effect in terms of public awareness but in reality it only reinforces the current paradigm.”</i>	Matthew describes ways in which he has been interacting with other global social actors who also seek to subvert the field. By gaining a critical mass of alternative action, these global social actors create new rules for the field.

Conclusion

This paper aims to explore the relationship between different strategies and those who enact them through different forums, to examine the implications for challenging or perpetuating the way things are (Spicer and Böhm, 2007; Courpasson *et al.*, 2012). There are variable interpretations of appropriate strategies and social actors manifest their responses in different forms and contexts that exist alongside one another as part of a complex picture of struggle. Some global social actors are struggling to reconcile their own actions in the context of their interrelationships with others, whilst pursuing agendas in their own interest and also for the greater good. Some interviewees related very specific instances that were difficult for them in their pursuit of sustainable practice, for example⁷: participants whose professional roles changed to be more industry-focused than sustainability-focused, with different interests beginning to be represented; concern that civil society participants become seen as the ‘mouthpiece’ of industry; meetings being held in parts of the world with questionable human rights records; and recognition that neutral/topic-driven debate is difficult when industries pay to participate (at times) and therefore their influence is questionable. There are other present contradictions in terms of socio-political difference (pro-Israel/pro-Palestine), different views on border controls, degrees of radical response, and the perpetuation of different types of inequality and privilege. There are variations in the interpretation of the most appropriate strategy and competition therein, resulting in inconsistent actions towards a transformative goal, but it is exactly this inconsistency and difference that may lead to the emergence of new worlds.

⁷ There were instances where my research participants asked me to not include detail of specific examples, hence including general descriptions here.

Those strategies that appear collaborative with the status quo are perceived to compete with those that appear directly confrontational in the context of global power relations (Dick, 2008). Multiple strategies can seem to produce inconsistent and contested actions towards a transformative goal against perceived dominance, with certain strategies privileged over others. The empirical material presented here represents a partial and indicative expression of social actors' strategies and that the contexts described are temporary and dynamic. The implications of contested responses to global inequalities for transformation in global contexts are manifest in the relationship between the different strategies enacted and the motivations of those who enact them. There is no doubt that social actors share resonance in their aim to achieve co-produced, sustainable, more equal outcomes (Spicer and Böhm, 2007; Courpasson *et al.*, 2012), albeit that the mode of enactment differs according to context and opportunity (Mumby, 2005). There is a lack of resolution between those who perceive conservation and/or succession and those who perceive subversion. However, what is clear is that there is conscious reflection by those who pursue strategies to participate within existing systems and recognition of the limitations of consenting to the invitation to participate. Following Mumby (2005), recognising the participants in the field are in a mutually constitutive relationship is important to understand how participation can reshape the issues of global significance through these forums.

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